

WMGK keeps on truckin' with new '70s

By CHUCK DARROW
Courier-Post Staff

With pop culture absolutely soaked in '70s nostalgia these days, it was only a matter of time before a local radio station instituted a format exclusively dedicated to the pop and rock hits of that era.

And so it was that WMGK (FM 102.9) decided its future was in the past.

With an astonishing lack of advance warning (or even leaks to the press), the station that pioneered the "soft rock" format in 1975 "flipped" on July 11.

Banished from the station were mellow adult contemporary hits. In their place were records representing a wide array of the decade's styles, from Led Zeppelin's epic rocker *Stairway to Heaven* to K.C. and the Sunshine Band's disco smash *That's the Way I Like It* to James Taylor's plaintive *Fire and Rain*.

Traditionally, radio stations change their formats as a response to sagging ratings (and the resultant sagging ad

ON THE AIR

revenues). But 'MGK, better known as "Magic," had long enjoyed solid, if unspectacular Arbitron numbers.

The change, explains Dean Tyler, vice-president and general manager of WMGK and its sister, big-band outlet WPEN (AM 950), had more to do with aesthetics than economics.

According to Tyler, the local glut of adult contemporary stations — including Magic, WBEB (FM 101.1) and WYSR (FM 104.5) — made it difficult for listeners to discern any differences among the outlets.

"Our research showed... people perceived the stations as being on top of each other. Whichever one they landed on was okay, and when they heard a song they didn't like, they just punched in the other stations."

In addition, he admits he found his station's soft-pop format "boring."

One option, says Tyler, "was to get even softer and more boring." The other

was to make a radical change.

Intrigued by the success of '70s-formatted stations in other markets, and buoyed by the popularity of the Saturday night '70s program hosted by long-time Magic personality Mike Bowe, Tyler and 'MGK Program Director Julian Breen petitioned the station's owner, New Brunswick-based General Media Inc., to give the '70s format a shot.

Early indications are the change is a winner; the station's musical blueprint is earning a lot of word of mouth among the "baby boomers" to whom it is targeted.

But for every winner, there has to be a loser. In this case it's Delilah, who combined listener interaction and Magic's soft hits to gain a loyal following for her Sunday through Thursday, 7 p.m. to midnight program.

According to Tyler, who has nothing but praise for the ousted disc jockey, her presentation just didn't jibe with the new musical format.

Another personality left out in the cold by the change is Julie Roberts,

who was the co-host of morning program. She has been elevated to the position of the show producer.

As for the mono-monicker personality, Tyler notes the "emphasizes music over personality" was given the option of veering with the times — by cutting back on folksy chatter — or hitting it

"It was his choice to accept. But he understands what we're doing."

Right now, the top priority for Breen is to fine-tune the station to maintain its integrity. While there is plenty of "tweaking" to be done, Breen promises listeners will only hear the best of the time.

"There will be no late-'60s/'80s," he pledges. It had to be said in the '70s to get on

For the Birds

Tonight, the Jeff Laurie for real as the Eagles play

Fat chance for happiness

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
Syndicated Columnist

DEAR ABBY: I, too, have struggled with weight all my adult life. I am 36. The man I was married to for 11 years constantly threatened to leave me if I ever became fat.

Well, I spent most of my married life wishing he would leave. As I got heavier and heavier, topping 300 pounds, he didn't leave me, but I left him!

DEAR ABBY

containing photos from the late '30s through the '50s. It apparently had belonged to a Japanese couple whose last name was "Tsunekawa."

Smack dab in the middle of this album are photographs of (presumably) the Tsunekawas and fellow Japanese Americans in an internment camp at Poston,

NAMES & FACES

Shock jock abandons poll

Good news, felons. There'll be no shocks from the shock jock. Howard Stern, who promised to bring back the electric chair if elected governor, has thrown the switch on his political career.

The raunchy radio personali-

